



Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee

Submission

Australian Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval Overseas Service) Bill 2020

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

The Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee is the national witness and advocacy committee of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia, representing Friends throughout the country. We work with other Quaker peace groups across the region and around the world, including the Quaker United Nations Offices in New York and Geneva, Friends World Committee on Consultation Asia West Pacific, Friends Committee on National Legislation in the United States, the Quaker Council for European Affairs and the American Friends Service Committee.

The Religious Society of Friends is one of the traditional peace churches, actively working around the world to: remove the underlying reasons for war, build strong and resilient networks for peace, and engage with those decision-makers who have responsibility for sending the nation's sons and daughters to war.

In an Australian democracy, it should be the case that we would have 151 opportunities to meet with representatives of our local electorates, and 78 opportunities to discuss the importance of peace over conflict with our senators whose voices represent Australians in the 'upper house' of the people's government.

However, in this matter of utmost importance we, and all Australians, are silenced.

Even the right of all our elected Parliamentarians to shoulder such responsibility, to argue in favour or against, is impermissible – despite a Roy Morgan poll in late 2020 showing that 83.3% of Australians want Parliament to decide whether troops are sent into armed conflict abroad. Rather, our Parliamentarians, and all Australians, are relegated to the side-lines as decisions are made by a small cadre of politicians having the shared perspective that military conflict is the best, if not the only, answer to the tensions and events before them.

While we will always seek peaceful approaches to resolving conflict, it is the absence of robust debate and inclusion of the people's voices, which we believe has led Australia to recent sustained military engagements which have not only cost Australian lives, but also allocated funding resources away from public priority areas such as health and education. In an era when counter-terrorism strategies are ongoing, there is likely to be increasing pressure on our government to commit special forces to 'secret' operations without proper transparency and authority by Parliament.

We support the intent behind the Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval Overseas Service) Bill 2020, and anticipate that details to provide the legal authority to ensure democratic participation will be met. We especially favour the inclusion of provisions on regular reporting to Parliament on the status of any current military operations abroad – ideally with an opportunity for Parliamentary debate on those reports.

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Convener
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